

XVI. *A Letter from John Zephaniah Howel, Esq; F. R. S. to John Campbell, Esq; F. R. S. giving an Account of a new Species of Oak.*

Exeter, Feb. 24, 1772.

S I R,

Read April 1, 1772. **I**N my curious rambles through the environs of this city, I have been tempted to visit the nursery of Mr. William Lucombe, of St. Thomas, on the report of a very extraordinary and new species of oak, first discovered and propagated by that ingenious gardener; and as this plant appears to me capable of proving an inestimable acquisition to this kingdom, I cannot resist the desire I feel of communicating to you some particulars relative to its history and character, taken partly from Mr. Lucombe's account of it, and my own observations. This, I know, must be most acceptable to you, who are so laboriously and laudably employed in elucidating the various improvements and advantages your country is capable of.

About seven years past, Mr. Lucombe sowed a parcel of acorns, saved from a tree of his own growth, of the iron or wainscot species; when they came up, he observed one amongst them that kept
his

his leaves throughout the winter; struck with the phenomenon, he cherished, and paid particular attention to it, and propagated, by grafting, some thousands from it, which I had the pleasure of seeing, eight days ago, in high flourishing beauty and verdure, notwithstanding the severity of the winter. Its growth is straight, and handsome as a fir, its leaves ever-green, and the wood is thought, by the best judges, in hardness and strength to exceed all other oak. He makes but one shoot in the year, viz. in May, and continues growing without interruption; whereas other oaks shoot twice, namely, in May and August; but the peculiar and estimable part of its character is, the amazing quickness of its growth, which I imagine may be attributed (in some degree at least) to its making but one shoot in the year; for I believe all trees that shoot twice, are, for some time, at a stand before they make the second. I had the curiosity to take the dimensions of the parent tree (seven years old), and some of the grafts; the first measured 21 feet high, and full 20 inches in the girth; a graft of four years old 16 feet high, and full 14 inches in the girth; the first he grafted is six years old, and has out-shot his parent 2 feet in height. The parent tree seems to promise his acorns soon, as he blossoms, and forms his foot-stalk strong, and the cup upon the foot-stalk with the appearance of the acorn, which, with a little more age, will swell to perfection. This oak is distinguished, in this county, by the title of The Lucombe Oak; his shoots, in general, are from 4 to 5 feet every year, so that he will, in the space of thirty or forty years, out-grow in altitude and girth the common oak at a

hundred. In two or three days I will forward to you, in a parcel, a branch, which I cut off from the original tree, and another from the graft of four years old, also a dead branch of the iron or wainscot oak, just to shew that, from the similitude of the leaves, it is a descendant from that species, although differing from it in every other particular. I send you also, by the Exeter stage, a specimen of the wood. I have a walking-pole full 5 feet long, a side shoot from one of the grafts, only one year and half old. Several gentlemen round this neighbourhood, and in the adjoining counties of Cornwall and Somerset, have planted them, and they are found to flourish in all soils.

I am, Dear Sir,

Your faithful friend, and

most obedient humble servant,

J. Z. Holwell.